

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Barbara McConnell Barrett, of Arizona, to be Secretary of the Air Force.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I mentioned yesterday the contrast between our work in the Senate and what is transpiring over in the House.

On this side of the Capitol, we are focused on working for the American people. We are overcoming the Democrats' historic delay tactics and obstruction to confirm more of the President's impressive nominees for the executive branch as well as for the judiciary. Later today, we will confirm a new Secretary of the Air Force and will then turn to several impressive nominees to district court vacancies in order to continue our renewal of the Federal judiciary.

We will also keep working on the appropriations process and on providing the funding our Armed Forces certainly need, and we are discussing ways to discourage the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Middle East and ensure the United States continues to provide the essential global leadership that has cornered ISIS and other radical Islamic terrorists and has kept our Nation safe.

So what is going on over in the House?

Those in the House are doubling down on their 3-year-old obsession of finding ways to nullify the decision the American people made back in 2016. Speaker PELOSI's Democrats are blocking the USMCA, which is the landmark trade deal that would create 176,000 new jobs for American workers. They are dragging their heels on funding the government, which is keeping our military commanders in limbo. All of their energy is going into this all-consuming impeachment parade that has been rolling on for 3 years now—ever searching for a rationale.

Remember, it was literally on Inauguration Day of January 2017 when the Washington Post ran this headline: "The campaign to impeach President Trump has begun." Well, the Post got it right. Before President Trump even took office, one prominent House Democrat had already declared he would not be a legitimate President. Just a few months later, another was already

promising she would not rest until she impeached him.

From the very beginning of this Presidency, Washington Democrats have lived in a state of denial. They have seemed positive that some inside-the-Beltway maneuver would save them from the consequences of Secretary Clinton's defeat. They had hoped Special Counsel Mueller's report would have validated their theories about the conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russians. They used their minority powers in the Senate to effectively try to nullify his Presidency by obstructing even completely uncontroversial nominees to all kinds of government posts simply because this President was the one who nominated them.

There have been 3 years of this. Now, finally, Speaker PELOSI's efforts to hold back her leftwing caucus have officially crumbled, and the House has thrown itself into impeachment.

Given the lip service the House Democrats pay in defending the norms and institutions of American Government, you might think they would at least run this so-called impeachment inquiry by the book. You might think the people who are trying to overrule the American voters and, from Washington, cancel out an election would conduct their process by the very highest standards of fairness and due process.

If you thought that, you would be wrong. Our Democratic colleagues have had their minds made up since long before this inquiry began. Remember, the chairwoman of one of the committees Speaker PELOSI put in charge of the process said in April of 2017: "I'm going to fight every day until he's impeached." That was back in 2017. So this is not about seriously discharging constitutional responsibilities. It is about the end result they have had in mind since day one.

Remember when the campaign to block Justice Kavanaugh began with protest signs with a big, empty blank for the name? It was a fill-in-the-blank protest before they even knew who the nominee was. Now we have the sequel with this fill-in-the-blank quest for impeachment. The Democrats' process already speaks for itself.

For the first time ever, Speaker PELOSI has simply ordered the House to conduct an inquiry into impeaching a President without a full vote of the House. Just yesterday, the Speaker doubled down on this unprecedented and undemocratic process by once again refusing to hold a vote on an impeachment inquiry.

Democrats have refused to give Republicans the same rights and fair treatment that Republicans afforded Democrats during the Clinton impeachment—things like equal subpoena power for the ranking members. Likewise, Democrats have refused to give President Trump's counsel the same opportunities that Republicans gave to President Clinton—rights such as at-

tending all hearings, depositions, offering evidence, and cross-examining witnesses.

We have already seen Chairman SCHIFF say in public that his committee had not been in touch with the whistleblower when they actually had been. We have seen Chairman SCHIFF bizarrely and brazenly fabricate what the President actually said to the President of Ukraine during an official hearing that he was chairing, only to claim that his fabrications were a parody—a parody—when Republicans called him out for it.

The same Democrats who are running this circus turn around and claim with a straight face that they are solemnly following the facts and the Constitution wherever it leads.

Give me a break. Give me a break. The entire country can see that that is not what is happening here.

And here is what else the American people can see: The Democrats would rather fight with the White House than work with the Republicans and the administration to pass legislation.

We need real solutions, like full-year funding for our Armed Forces so our men and women in uniform can receive their pay raise and our commanders can engage in long-term planning; real solutions like the USMCA, the major victory for American workers and American businesses that the Trump administration negotiated with Canada and Mexico but which Speaker PELOSI has blocked for months, with 176,000 new American jobs hanging in the balance.

Opportunities are right before us. Senate Republicans have been ready and waiting for weeks and months to do our part and actually make law on these subjects for the benefit of American families. We just need our counterparts across the Capitol to get serious about this.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, just when you think things couldn't get any stranger here in Washington, DC, a few weeks ago, Speaker PELOSI announced that the House was officially beginning proceedings to impeach the President of the United States. While the left has been dreaming of impeachment ever since the President was first elected in 2016, the timing of this was quite a surprise. In fact, last January the Speaker led the effort to table an impeachment resolution, and she and Chairman NADLER and Chairman SCHIFF and other House leaders had said that they recognized that this would never be successful unless it is bipartisan, and I think they were right then and they are wrong now.

We know that the announcement of the Speaker came at a time when the only thing the public knew was about rumors of a whistleblower complaint about a call over which virtually no one knew any details.

But the facts didn't really matter. This was about grabbing ahold of something and using this as a vehicle to do what the left has wanted to do since the President was inaugurated.

Were the initial reports a reason to look into the matter further? Absolutely. That is what the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that I have the privilege of serving on did. We had the Acting Director of National Intelligence come testify. We had the inspector general come testify about his report.

But that is not the approach that House Democrats have taken. They made no honest effort to investigate before deciding to impeach.

Prior to the Speaker's press conference, in fact, we hadn't seen the complaint. We hadn't seen the transcript or heard from the leaders of the intelligence community. But regardless of the lack of any evidence at the time, they jumped into impeachment feet first. It is almost as if they were waiting for anything—any excuse, any reason at all—to do what they have wanted to do since day one in opposing President Trump.

This confirms to me that this is really not about the facts so much as it is a search-and-destroy mission.

Removing a President from office is no small matter. In fact, the Senate has never done so in American history. You would think that with so much at stake, our House Democrat friends would make every effort to lay out a careful, logical, fact-based case for the American people.

In fact, they said they knew they couldn't be successful unless this was a bipartisan effort, but they made zero effort to make it bipartisan by laying out the facts, by making it transparent, by letting the American people see exactly what was going on.

Ordinarily, you would expect hearings on every major network, witnesses presenting their testimony, subject to questioning by both Republicans and Democrats, and detailed reports of investigations. That is what you would expect, but that is not what we got.

Instead, we got secret hearings, secret witnesses, secret interviews, and secret meetings. But you know what goes along with that kind of secrecy—leaks and more leaks.

Chairman SCHIFF and his cohorts in the House have drawn the cloak of secrecy around this entire proceeding and then proceeded to drip, drip, drip a narrative to the press through leaks that would seem to justify their arguments, but that is not fair. That is not fair to the President. That is not fair to the 65 million American people who voted for President Trump. To try to negate an election through this sort of inappropriate process just defies logic and sense.

We have some idea of whom they are meeting with, but we have no idea as to the details they are talking about. That is because, instead of going through the Judiciary Committee, which would have been an open proceeding, ordinarily, Speaker PELOSI has grabbed this topic from Chairman NADLER and given it to Chairman SCHIFF, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, so as to have some sort of justification, as thin as it may seem, for doing things behind closed doors and in secret.

As I said, I am on the Senate Intelligence Committee. I understand that if there is classified information that can't be made public, that is a reason to have closed-door hearings, but there should be some effort to separate the classified information, if there is any, from the nonclassified information and have a public hearing on that part of the information the committee is given, not just closing the door, locking it, and throwing away the key, and keeping it all secret. This is really unjustified.

Well, we know that they have been busy. Chairman SCHIFF has been busy. We know he has been particularly busy on the TV talk shows and giving interviews to the media all day long, every day, and we know that there are bits of information being strategically leaked to the media, which conveniently align with their overall plan, and that is impeachment.

There have been no real and credible details about what has happened behind those closed-door meetings, and I would suggest that every American should be concerned. This is entirely contrary to our basic concepts of fairness and due process—to have secret witnesses, secret interviews, secret hearings, and then use that information to take one of the most dramatic actions that the Constitution provides for, and that is the removal of a President.

This is contrary to any concept of fair play and due process, as guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and our Constitution. You could be charged with a traffic offense and get more transparency and more due process than what the House Democrats are providing to President Trump, because that is what the Constitution requires.

Because the Speaker made a decision to impeach President Trump based at the time solely on rumors and second-hand information, I am left with very little optimism for the way this impeachment inquiry so far has been handled.

Now, there have been some silly hearings in the House of Representatives this year, but the American people should have the benefit of being able to watch these proceedings and draw their own conclusions. They don't have to believe what the press tells them based on strategic leaks. They don't have to believe what Chairman SCHIFF and Speaker PELOSI say. They can judge the facts for themselves.

When it comes to impeachment, arguably one of the most serious responsibilities under our Constitution for Congress, House Democrats have simply drawn the cloak of secrecy around their investigation. Of course, you know what the logical questions are to this sort of bizarre proceeding—questions like this: What are they hiding? What are they afraid of? What is it that they don't want the American people to see?

Of course, as I said, there are going to be some sensitivities and, perhaps, even some classified information, particularly when you are talking about foreign policy.

But the President has already made the key documents public. He has declassified the conversation he had with President Zelensky, and we have seen the report of the inspector general.

This secrecy veil seems to be more of a necessary tool to cloak information that doesn't align with their narrative. They simply don't want people to hear all sides of the story.

I have no doubt that if the facts were on their side, they would allow this process to be in the open. If they actually thought that transparency would benefit them, they would throw the doors wide open and do it out in public and let the American people judge it for themselves, and if facts were on their side, they would then hold a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives authorizing this impeachment inquiry, which has been done each time in the past. But from what we read, Speaker PELOSI is trying to protect her vulnerable House Members from being held accountable for their vote, particularly those in swing districts that won in 2018. So this is more another part of the political calculation at work here.

Instead, what they are doing is constructing this narrative behind closed doors and handpicking which information to leak and which to keep secret.

A true and honest investigation means following the facts where they may lead, gathering evidence, and giving the American people access to that information at every step, but that is a far cry from what is happening today.

While House Democrats are freely leaking the details of the impeachment process to the media, they are being unfair to the American people, particularly the 65 million people who voted for President Trump in the first place—but not just them. We all understand that in elections you win some and you lose some. Even the people who didn't vote for President Trump, I believe, would be committed to a fair process, particularly when going through something as serious as the potential impeachment and removal of a duly elected President of the United States.

What they want to do is to undo the 2016 election, but they should at least have the courage to do it out in the open.

We know what is happening as a result of the Democrats devoting 100 percent of their time and energy to reversing the results of the 2016 election by impeaching President Trump. Their constituents sitting at home are wondering what it is they are actually going to be able to accomplish.

When we have elections, ordinarily candidates run for office and say: If you elect me, I will do this, this, and this. The House Democrats have given up on that. Forget their campaign promises. Forget what they told their voters in the 2018 election. They are all in on the impeachment and removal of the President. The rest of that stuff is just talk—at least that is how it appears.

There are a lot of important things we can and should be doing in Washington as opposed to this political side show. We have had many productive hearings and efforts on such important items as trying to reduce mass violence, which is something we are all concerned about, how to bring down costs and increase choice when it comes to our healthcare system, how to improve trade so we can sell the things we grow and make in America to markets around the world, and how we can continue this incredible trend line when it comes to our economy, where unemployment is at historically low levels and particularly African-American and Hispanic unemployment is at historically the lowest level in recorded history. Forget all of that. House Democrats are full steam ahead on impeachment, which will make it virtually impossible for us to pass productive, bipartisan legislation. It will make it virtually impossible for them to keep the promises they themselves made to their constituents when they ran for election in 2018, and that is a crying shame.

This is the final point I want to make. We are 13 months—13 months—from a general election. President Trump will be on the ballot. These folks, who apparently have never gotten over their loss in 2016, will have a chance to cast their votes again. So will the American people. We will be able to take a look at the Democratic nominee, along with President Trump, the Republican nominee, and we will be able to vote 13 months from now. But, to me, it says the Democrats are not particularly optimistic about the outcome of the 2020 election, given that choice, because they are not going to wait for the election to occur; they want to divide the country, they want to paralyze Congress, and they want to impeach President Trump 13 months before the election.

I hope cooler heads will prevail. Democrats should work with us to pass bipartisan legislation that will actually make our country better off rather than pursuing this purely political agenda of impeachment.

I think it is disgraceful the way the House Democrats have chosen to pursue this clandestine impeachment

process rather than focus on what is best for the American people. Let the voters cast their ballots 13 months from now rather than put our country through this divisive and ultimately futile effort to impeach and remove President Trump.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

CONGRATULATING THE ST. LOUIS BLUES

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to talk about a very different topic, and that is the Stanley Cup. Yesterday at the White House, the St. Louis Blues were warmly welcomed by the President in a ceremony celebrating their Stanley Cup victory. On June 12, the Blues made history when they defeated the Boston Bruins in game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final.

It was hard to imagine at the beginning of this season that the Blues could have done this. They were the lowest ranked team in the National Hockey League. I think there was a time in the month of January when the odds that the Blues would win the Stanley Cup were 150 to 1. I am not particularly a betting man, but knowing what I know now, we wouldn't have had to put much money on that bet to have won a significant amount of money. As it turned out, however, as you and I know in what we do here and what we have done in our lives, the odds are not really what count; what counts is how you play the season. Just like we often say in politics, candidates matter. In hockey, in sports, the players matter. How they come together as a team matters. Whether or not that team really becomes a team matters, and this one did.

It was a season for the Blues that was filled with record-breaking achievements. Jordan Binnington became the first and only rookie goalie to win 16 games in the Stanley Cup playoffs. Ryan O'Reilly set a franchise record with 23 points in the playoffs and was named the postseason most valuable player. Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final was the most watched NHL game in 36 years.

For the first time in franchise history, the Blues brought the Stanley Cup trophy to Missouri to celebrate their achievement as the best sports fans in Missouri stepped out. Five hundred thousand people were there when the Stanley Cup parade was in St. Louis for the first time. Five hundred thousand people—in several States represented on the floor, that would be everybody in the State. Five hundred thousand is a pretty big crowd anywhere, as it was in St. Louis that day.

Today, the Stanley Cup trophy will be on display on Capitol Hill so that Blues fans in the area can get a chance to see this legendary trophy in person. The Stanley Cup has already traveled all over the world since the Blues won the Stanley Cup. Ryan O'Reilly brought the Cup to Ontario to share it with his 99-year-old grandmother, who is probably one of the oldest people to

see the Stanley Cup. But for sure the youngest baby to be put in the Stanley Cup—the record was broken when the trophy was brought to a mother and her newborn child at Mercy Hospital in St. Louis, the baby barely born, right there in the Stanley Cup, setting the new Stanley Cup “youngest baby in the Cup” record.

We will never forget the image of Laila Anderson. Laila, a young girl battling a life-threatening disease, in many ways became the No. 1 fan of the team. Laila, by the way, was at the White House in the Rose Garden yesterday, and she was called up to stand by the President and the Stanley Cup, with the team surrounding both of them. The night they won, she was on the ice with the players celebrating as the Stanley Cup was passed around at the end of game 7.

The day after the Blues received their championship rings, two players visited Laila to personally deliver her very own ring. I saw those rings yesterday, and they are just about as big as Laila's hand. They were big rings. Her name was inscribed on the diamond-studded championship ring that was given to her, which also included the words “Play Gloria,” which became the theme song, fight song, inspirational song for the Blues at the end of the season.

Blues fans have plenty to be excited about this season. The majority of the names of the players that are now etched on the Stanley Cup are back this year. The roster is even better with the addition of defenseman Justin Faulk.

We are also proud to say that St. Louis will host the 2020 NHL All-Star Game in January. That game, of course, brings together the most talented players in professional hockey. I know St. Louis is ready to welcome them, and we will all be excited to further solidify St. Louis's place as one of the great sports cities in America.

It has been a great year for Blues fans, and I hope the team will once again have the opportunity to visit the White House next year. This will be the first year of many years where those of us in the Missouri delegation will get to host the Stanley Cup in the Capitol.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the House of Representatives continues to investigate the circumstances of the President's interaction with Ukrainian President Zelensky and whether he used the power of his office to pressure

a foreign leader to intervene in an American election on his behalf. The facts that are already in the public domain are so deeply troubling and must be taken very seriously. I know that our colleagues in the House of Representatives did not run for office to begin an impeachment inquiry, but this task was thrust upon them by the President's alleged conduct and the demands of the Constitution of our Republic.

Here in the Senate, our job is even more austere. We are assigned the power not only to examine the evidence but to render judgment. We all have a solemn duty to follow the facts impartially and let ourselves be governed by reason, rather than by passion or by politics. That role means that we have a responsibility to behave impartially, in a nonpartisan manner from the outset. As my friend Leader MCCONNELL said during the 1998 impeachment debate, "it's been my view that I don't, as a potential juror, if it's serious enough to warrant a potential impeachment proceeding, I don't think I ought to pre-judge the case."

Yet already a few of my Senate Republican colleagues seem determined to turn this serious inquiry into another partisan exercise. My friend the Republican leader, here on the floor yesterday, made the sadly predictable attack of calling the work of the majority in the House partisan. Another of my colleagues, Senator GRAHAM, said he was trying to organize a letter of Senate Republicans promising they would not vote to convict the President before the House even completes its inquiry—before any articles of impeachment are even drafted, let alone voted on, before a scrap of evidence was considered in the Senate trial, if it comes to that. Senator GRAHAM seems to be advocating "Alice in Wonderland" justice—first the verdict, then the trial. I hope he will rethink that.

Over the State work period, the Republican leader ran an advertisement in which he declared: "The way that impeachment stops is a Senate majority with me as majority leader." That is a far cry from what he said in 1998: "not prejudging the case."

We are several steps away from a potential trial in the Senate. The House continues to do its work diligently, even handedly, with only the facts in mind. So I remind my Republican colleagues in this Chamber that committing today to vote not guilty is contrary to their oath to do impartial justice. That is their oath. Instead of prejudging, I remind my Republican colleagues in this body that you have a responsibility to put country over party. Our national security, the rule of law, and our democracy are at stake.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. President, we are witnessing in realtime the collapse of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Five years of hard fighting in Syria to first destabilize and then to degrade ISIS has potentially been undone in one

phone call. The President's abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. forces has abandoned the field to our enemies—ISIS, Iran, Putin, and Bashar al-Assad—and it has put our friends in danger, including two of the closest friends we have in the Middle East, the Syrian Kurds and Israel.

I want to be very clear. The President's decision poses a threat to our national security here in the United States. By green-lighting President Erdogan's operation and abandoning the Syrian Kurds to face the onslaught on their own, the President has made an already fragile situation in northern Syria more dangerous and handed a "get out of jail free" card to potentially more than 10,000 ISIS fighters. ISIS has threatened the United States and our allies repeatedly, taken Americans hostages and executed them, and will undoubtedly continue to threaten our security if they experience a resurgence.

We New Yorkers know best, unfortunately, how a small group of fanatics half a world away can do incredible damage and kill thousands of Americans here on our soil. Now, with ISIS prisoners escaping, unfortunately, the chances of that are increasing, not just according to me but to an expert like General Mattis.

Make no mistake. The President's incompetence has put American lives in danger. Today, the House of Representatives will consider a resolution that condemns the President's decision and demands that he reverse course. It should pass with bipartisan support and should be the first order of business for us here in the Senate—the first order of business. Sanctions against Erdogan are fine and good. President Erdogan should be punished for his military adventurism and his aggression, but sanctions alone are insufficient, and they are particularly insufficient in regard to ISIS. Sanctions will not put ISIS fighters back on the run or back in their cells. They will not stop Iran and Putin's growing influence in the region, nor will they undo America's betrayal of our partners and allies. Sanctions can be an effective tool, but they are not the only tool, especially when the crisis in this case is of the President's own making. The simplest and most effective remedy would be for the President to admit his mistake and correct course.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, earlier this summer, both Houses of Congress and the White House arrived at a budget agreement that gave us a blueprint for funding the government, but in September, Republicans unilaterally walked away from our agreement and proposed taking \$12 billion from domestic programs—including Head Start, HHS, and even the Pentagon—to fund the President's border wall. This is a nonstarter. There aren't enough votes in the Chamber to pass it.

As we look to get the appropriations back on track, I was disappointed that

Senate Republicans let the entire State work period pass without responding to Democratic offers. Instead of spending that time negotiating with House Democrats on allocations, Senate Republicans have sat on their hands, and now we are back in session this week at the same impasse. Republicans are insisting on the same thing they unsuccessfully shut down the government for last year: \$12 billion for a border wall that President Trump promised Mexico would pay for.

If Senate Republicans don't wake up and resume good-faith negotiations with Democrats, I fear we are headed down the same road.

PENSIONS

Mr. President, for decades, millions of Americans labored in construction and mining and truck driving and other industries with the promise of a secure retirement when they reached old age through their pension. But through no fault of their own, forces like a financial crisis, a dwindling labor force, and inaction on the part of the Federal Government, their pension plans are now at risk of becoming insolvent within a decade. This is an immediate problem. It is going to destroy the security of millions of retirees—people who worked all their lives. They put a little bit of money away that they could have spent when they needed it, but they put it in for their retirement hoping that the day they retire they wouldn't become rich, but at least they could live decently. Now that may be vanished—vanished. Congress has the power to stop this problem dead in its tracks. Just 2 months ago, the House passed the Butch Lewis Act, which would provide immediate relief to "critical and declining" pension plans so we can keep our promise to our workers. Leader MCCONNELL and Senate Republicans, once again, inexplicably, have refused to take action on this bipartisan legislation. Senate Republicans blocked us from even debating it last night. So in a short time, I will join my colleagues, including Senators BROWN, STABENOW, MANCHIN, MURRAY, and WYDEN to demand that Leader MCCONNELL allow us a vote on legislation to protect these millions of workers and secure the retirements they have earned.

President Trump often claims to be looking out for the American worker, but his policies set them further and further adrift. This one is notorious. Retirement, a decent retirement, is part of the American dream and part of the American way. Here is a chance for President Trump to actually defend American workers instead of hurting them.

If President Trump is truly the champion of the American worker, he will prevail on our Republican colleagues to start working with Democrats to make sure—make sure—we protect the pensions that millions of families rely on for their security and have paid for.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF BARBARA MCCONNELL BARRETT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, later today, the Senate will vote to confirm Barbara Barrett as Secretary of the Air Force. I have come to the floor directly from a meeting with her this morning.

Ambassador Barrett has had an impressive career both inside and outside of government. Among other things, she has served as U.S. Ambassador to Finland, Deputy Administrator of the FAA, and as a member of the Civil Aeronautics Board. Most importantly, she has a deep understanding of the U.S. Air Force, thanks to her work as a civilian adviser to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs.

As a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on women in the services, she fought to expand opportunities for women in the military. She became the first civilian woman to land an F-18 on an aircraft carrier, which was part of a mission to demonstrate women's fitness to fly in combat. Thanks, in part, to her work in 1993, the military changed its regulations to allow women to fly combat aircraft.

I am always particularly interested in making sure we have an outstanding Air Force Secretary because my State of South Dakota is lucky enough to play host to Ellsworth Air Force Base, home of the 28th Bomb Wing and future home of the B-21 bomber.

Over the State work period in October, I was able to visit Ellsworth to sit down with the new commander of the 28th Bomb Wing, Col. David Doss, as well as CCM Rochelle Hemingway. We had a great discussion, and we had a chance to talk about the needs of the base going forward, including what will be needed as Ellsworth prepares to serve as the first home of the B-21.

Ensuring that the base has the necessary resources and infrastructure to fully support the B-21 mission will be a priority of mine not just as we await the mission but for decades to come.

Since I came to Congress, I have worked with the base and the Greater Rapid City community to build up Ellsworth. We have gone from fighting to keep the base open, to adding an MQ-9 Reaper mission and supporting the B-1 as a workhorse of the bomber fleet, to hosting the largest training airspace in the continental United States, and to being chosen to host both the B-21 training mission and first operational squadron.

I am incredibly proud of all that Ellsworth airmen have accomplished, and I am looking forward to seeing everything the team at the base will be able to do in the future.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Madam President, as I reflect on the critical role our military plays in the world, I want to take a moment to talk about what is happening in Syria right now and the U.S. response.

This is a complex situation. Given its proximity to several fronts of conflict and unrest, Turkey is facing immense pressure to address security concerns and is straining to support a huge number of refugees.

Turkey also has an understandable interest in rooting out terrorists within its country and stemming any factions that support them, but the Kurdish militias the United States has backed in Syria are not the same as the group Turkey has struggled to contain in its own country.

Turkey's decision to attack Kurdish forces in Syria will do nothing but exacerbate the humanitarian crisis on the border. It will also strengthen the Assad regime and foster greater influence in the region by Russia and Iran. Most alarmingly, Turkey's incursion will force the Kurds to pull resources that would otherwise be committed to keeping ISIS fighters imprisoned. It is deeply concerning that the withdrawal of U.S. forces has set this into motion.

As you know, a major reason for ISIS's rise was President Obama's decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq on a timetable that he announced to our enemies and before the security situation was stable. The departure of U.S. forces created a vacuum in the region that ISIS quickly stepped in to fill. It is important that we don't allow history to repeat itself.

U.S. and Kurdish forces have been working together against ISIS for years now and have succeeded in drastically shrinking ISIS's territory and weakening this terrorist organization. Thanks to their work, in many respects ISIS can be said to be on the run, but this achievement could quickly be undone by a U.S. withdrawal from the country.

I hope we will be able to have some fruitful discussions here in Washington this week about the need to maintain our strategic gains against ISIS and avoid creating a vacuum for our enemies to fill, and I hope our NATO ally Turkey is listening closely.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise today on the Senate floor to address an issue that is really fundamental to who we are as Americans. It is the issue of immigration.

We just celebrated, this past week, a day dedicated to Christopher Colum-

bus, who, supposedly, discovered America. Of course, we know better. Native Americans were here and discovered it before him, but he was the first European to discover America and really triggered an immigration to this part of the world that has really changed America and the world forever.

This immigration from all over the world has created one of the most diverse nations on Earth. I am a beneficiary of that immigration. My mother was an immigrant to America in 1911, coming here from Lithuania to East St. Louis, IL, where she was raised and where I had the chance to grow up, as well.

Today, her son—this immigrant mother's son—has been serving as a U.S. Senator from Illinois with humility and pride. It is an indication of our family's story, but it is also America's story—how immigrants came from far and wide to America and made lives and great futures and built families that continue to serve this Nation to this day.

You would think, since immigration is such a central part of who we are as Americans, that there would be a general consensus about the issue, but it turns out to be one of the most hotly contested and debated issues almost since the arrival of the Mayflower.

How many people should be allowed to come to this country? Where are they going to come from? What will they do when they come here? What impact will they have on those of us who are already here? All of these questions of national security have led us into an ongoing national debate about immigration.

Today, this morning, I come to the floor to discuss one aspect of it. This last Sunday morning, I was back in Illinois and was invited to a Democratic Party event in Schaumburg, IL. It was a fairly routine breakfast meeting of the Democratic township organization. I have been to many of them. It is great to see old friends.

When I arrived at the event, I was surprised to see demonstrators, protesters—perhaps 200 of them—holding signs with my name on them. It is not exactly the way you want to start a Sunday morning, greeting 200 people with signs about this fellow named Durbin. I had a chance to talk to them. I didn't run away from them because I wanted to find out who they were and why they were there.

By and large, they were people from India who are currently living in the United States and want to become legal citizens here. Most of them came to the United States bringing special skills that were needed. Many of them are in the Silicon Valley high-tech industries—engineers who came to the United States once companies certified that they couldn't find an American to fill the job, which is a requirement. Having been unable to find an American, these companies asked permission to bring in these highly skilled people from India to serve as engineers in the United States.

They come in on what is known as H-1B visas, by and large, and that allows them to work in the United States for several years and to renew that work status on a recurring basis. But there reached a point where they wanted to stay here. They have lived here awhile. They bring their families and raise their families here, and they want to become part of America's future. They apply for what is known as an employment-based immigrant visa, which leads to a green card. A green card is the ticket to legal, permanent residency, which can lead to citizenship.

So these people from India, who were waiting to see me and say a few words to me, stated the fact that the waiting list for those in this category from India has now passed 520,000. There are 520,000 who are seeking permanent status in our country.

I met one of them from my hometown of Springfield, IL, a young Indian physician who is serving at one of our hospitals in Springfield. He brought with him his daughter. His daughter is 12 years old. He is worried because if he, the physician who came here to work from India, is not allowed to legally stay in this country and his daughter reaches the age of 21, her status changes. She is no longer his dependent. She now has her own immigration status, and she is not technically, legally, beyond the age of 21, allowed to stay in this country.

So he says to me: Here is my daughter, who has been here for 10 years. This is the country she knows and loves and wants to be a part of, and if I don't get approval to stay as a doctor in this country, she is technically undocumented at that point, and we run into problems with the future.

For example, it is no surprise that this doctor wants to see his daughter go to college. Well, his daughter, undocumented, will not qualify for any assistance in the United States by way of Pell grants or loans. How is she going to pay for college? Where would she go? Our immigration system says, at that point, if her father doesn't reach this green card status, she would return to India, a place she maybe never remembers and that was part of her infancy in her early time here on Earth.

So it is a complicated situation. There is a debate under way here about how to stop this backlog of people who are waiting in line 10 years, 20 years, and more to reach green card status. You can imagine the uncertainty in their lives, the uncertainty for their children, and why they are looking for some relief.

I came to this issue never dreaming that I would end up being in the middle of most debates in the Senate on immigration, but I welcome it because it is such an important issue and because I have strong feelings myself about America's immigration policy.

I serve as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration for the Senate Judiciary

Committee. As I have said, my own personal family and life experience have really made me warm to the subject, and I try to learn as much as I can about a complex field. Make no mistake, the immigration system of the United States of America is badly, badly broken. How to fix it is hotly debated here in the Senate and in the House and across the Nation.

Last night, when I was watching the Presidential debates, groups were running ads on a regular basis on the issue of immigration. Many believe that it is going to be a hot topic in the 2020 election. It is quite possible that it will be. We know that in State legislatures and city halls, on cable news and social media, and almost everywhere, there is a debate under way about immigration. But there is one place where there is no debate about immigration—here in the U.S. Senate.

This year, we had one hearing in the Border Security and Immigration Subcommittee. And the Senate Judiciary Committee voted on only one immigration bill. The chairman limited debate to only one hour and didn't allow any amendments, and we have not had any debates on the floor of the Senate.

I look to the Galleries and the people who come to the Senate and expect to see a debate on an issue—an important issue. Here is one: immigration. But all they have is a speech from this Senator and a few others, instead of addressing the issue of immigration.

Senator KENNEDY has come to the floor, and I am going to make a unanimous consent request in just a few minutes. He is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, too, and I think he appreciates, as I do, what a great honor it is to serve on this storied committee. But the fact is that to have the titles of Judiciary Committee and Border Security and Immigration Subcommittee and to do nothing, I think, is a dereliction of duty.

We are supposed to step up and debate these things and come to the best bipartisan conclusion we can to solve problems in this country. Here is a problem we are not solving: how to deal with a backlog of people, highly skilled and important people, like the doctor from my hometown of Springfield, from India, who wants to have a green card, giving him an opportunity to become an American citizen.

Do you know what? I want that doctor to become an American citizen. I want him to get a green card. We need him in my hometown and many more just like him, and I want his family to be there with him so that his life is complete as he pursues his professional responsibilities.

Now, in recent weeks, there has been an effort to pass a bill to address this issue. The bill is S. 386. It is known as the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act. Unfortunately, there was an effort to pass it without any debate or a chance to even offer an amendment.

Now, this bill makes significant changes in our immigration laws, but

there has never been a hearing on the bill or a vote in the committee. The lead sponsor of the legislation is MIKE LEE, who is the senior Senator from Utah and a personal friend. He has negotiated several amendments in private with his Republican Senators, but there has been no conversation with myself or any other Democratic Senators about these negotiations.

That is not how the Senate should work. I believe I have seen the Senate at its best, and, unfortunately, it was 7 years ago. We decided—eight of us in the Senate, four Democrats and four Republicans—to actually sit down and try to fix the immigration system. It is a pretty ambitious task, but we had some pretty talented people engaged in it. Leading on the Republican side was John McCain from Arizona. Next to him was LINDSEY GRAHAM from South Carolina, Jeff Flake from Arizona, and MARCO RUBIO from Florida.

On our side, I was engaged with Senator CHUCK SCHUMER, who is now the Democrat Senate leader, as well as BOB MENENDEZ, of course, a Hispanic Senator from the State of New Jersey, and MICHAEL BENNET from Colorado.

So the eight of us came together. We did what I think the Senate is supposed to do. We sat down and took our time and spent months, every single week, sometimes several evenings each week, going through a different section of our immigration law and trying to make it work, reform it, and change it. It took us months—some 6 months of meetings. That is what we are elected to do.

We produced a comprehensive immigration reform bill that was supported by virtually everyone. Groups of business leaders, as well as groups of labor leaders, the church community, and all sorts of people from the conservative side of politics to the liberal side of politics said that this was a good, fair, bipartisan compromise.

So in 2013, we reported this bill to the floor, after our Democratic Judiciary Committee chairman at that time, PATRICK LEAHY from Vermont, had a lengthy hearing. We considered over 100 amendments—amendments offered by those who were voting against the bill, like Jeff Sessions from Alabama, and amendments offered by those supporting the bill, like MAZIE HIRONO from Hawaii. Each person offered an amendment, debated it, and we voted. It sounded like the U.S. Senate; didn't it? We were actually voting on amendments on a critically important bill. Thanks to Chairman LEAHY's skill and patience, I might add, after hundreds of amendments were considered, the bill was reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, came to the floor of the Senate in 2013, and we called for a vote. It passed 68 to 32. After all that work, on a bipartisan basis, we finally got it right. I thought we did, and I voted for it.

Sadly, that bill was sent across the Rotunda, over to the House of Representatives, as the Constitution requires, and, unfortunately, the Republican Speaker, John Boehner, refused

to call the bill or debate an alternative to it. It literally died from lack of any effort to deal with the issue in the U.S. House of Representatives.

So one would ask—that was more than 6 years ago—what has happened since? The answer is nothing—virtually nothing—except decisions by the Trump administration, for example, to eliminate some aspects of our immigration law, like the DACA provision.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent for 3 additional minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. In light of an attempt to pass the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act without hearings or debate, I come to the floor today to present an alternative. I am introducing the Resolving Extended Limbo for Immigrant Employees and Families Act, known as the RELIEF Act, which will treat all immigrants fairly by eliminating immigrant visa backlogs.

One of the most serious problems of our immigration system is that there are not enough immigrant visas, known as green cards. As a result, immigrants are stuck in crippling backlogs for decades. Close to 4 million future Americans, many of whom already live and work in the United States, are on the State Department's immigrant visa waiting list. However, under current law, only 226,000 family green cards and 140,000 employee green cards are available each year. Children and spouses of lawful permanent residents, known as LPRs, count against these caps, which further limit the number of available green cards.

The backlogs are a tremendous hardship on families caught in this situation. Children of parents waiting to become LPRs often age out, as I described earlier, because they are no longer children by the time the green cards are available for them. The solution is clear: increase the number of green cards.

Let's be clear. Lifting green card country caps alone, without increasing green cards, as the bill that Senator LEE is sponsoring would do, will not eliminate the backlog for Indian immigrants, the nationality with the most people in the employment backlog, and it will dramatically increase backlogs for the rest of the world.

Mr. Ira Kurzban, who is the Nation's expert on immigration laws, has said that we are virtually trying to solve the problem with Senator LEE's bill for Indian immigrants at the expense of everyone else in the world. He says:

From 2023 until well into the 2030s, there will be zero EB-2 visas for the rest of the world. None for China, South Korea, Philippines, Britain, Canada, Mexico, every country in the [European Union] and all of Africa. Zero.

It would also choke off green cards for every important profession that isn't in the information technology field.

More than 20 national organizations have now rallied against the Lee legis-

lation and have said things such as that the bill offers a "zero-sum approach," pitting one group of immigrants against another to fight the broken immigration system.

The RELIEF Act, which I am introducing today, is a solution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2603

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used his extra 3 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. I am making a unanimous consent request.

As in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2603, introduced earlier today; further, that the bill be considered read three times and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, reserving the right to object, no one in this Chamber has more respect for the senior Senator from Illinois and the Democratic whip than I do. I share much of his frustration. I also share, and I believe what the Senator also believes, that immigration is an extraordinarily important subject that this body should be addressing. We are a nation of immigrants. The American people support legal immigration. I know the senior Senator from Illinois supports it. I certainly support it.

I am rising to object because a number of my colleagues—and I don't want to simply put it on them; I join with them in this—would like a little additional time to study this bill. Equally important, if not more important, many of my colleagues' sentiment is that we should take this bill up first in the Judiciary Committee.

I commit to the minority whip that I will join with him in trying to get our esteemed chairman to take this bill up. I don't think we ought to be afraid of this issue. I don't think we ought to be reluctant to take difficult votes. That is why we are here in the U.S. Senate. I also cannot think of a subject that is more important for this body to address than the subject of immigration, including but not limited to legal and illegal immigration.

The fact of the matter is that the American people deserve an immigration system that looks like somebody designed it on purpose.

For the reasons I just expressed, Madam President, I respectfully object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank my colleague from Louisiana. We have worked on things together, and I hope we will continue to do so in the future.

This is controversial, but it is so timely and important. The hundreds of people who demonstrated against this Senator last Sunday were people I welcomed into this country and believe will be an important part of our future. I am willing to find a solution to the problem, and I am willing to work on a bipartisan basis to do it. Your help will be invaluable.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia.

Mitch McConnell, Martha McSally, Rick Scott, John Thune, Mike Crapo, Lamar Alexander, Johnny Isakson, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Roger F. Wicker, John Hoeven, Mike Rounds, Kevin Cramer, Steve Daines, John Boozman, Cindy Hyde-Smith, James E. Risch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON), and the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS), the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO), the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 90, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 315 Ex.]

YEAS—90

Baldwin	Blumenthal	Braun
Barrasso	Blunt	Brown
Blackburn	Boozman	Burr